



*...Those who wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint. Isaiah 40:31*

# Wings

**A FAITHLETTER FOR, BY AND ABOUT UNITED METHODISTS WITH DISABILITIES**

**Summer 1999— Vol. 10 Issue 1 No. 37**

## AT THE AD BOARD MEETING: AN IMMODEST PROPOSAL

*Editor's Note: Recently a manuscript fragment which appears to record a church administrative board meeting came into our possession. Feeling it would be of interest to our readers, we are presenting it here in place of the usual "From Where I Sit" column. Although the manuscript's author is unidentified, all indications are that it was not written by John Cleese. The fragment seems to begin sometime into the meeting just as the pastor is about to give his report:*

"Thank you, Richard. Before proceeding, I want to add my delight at the success of last week's bake sale. I am of the opinion that there is not a Methodist Church in the Conference with better brownie bakers than Barbara and the ladies...Yes, thank you, I think that does warrant a nice hand for Barbara's brownie baker bettors...baker brownie barbers...uh, the UMW...

"Well, moving right along here—'Proposal for Church Renewal.' Yes. Well, some of us have been concerned about our lack of growth and vitality, and...Yes, Jim?...Yes, quite so, Jim. To be perfectly fair, some of us haven't been concerned, but I do think that in our little church family we must respect all sides. Right? So, with your permission...

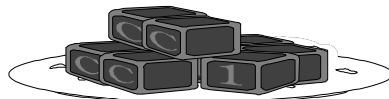
"Well, it's really quite simple. Surprised no one else has come up with it before...other than Jesus, I suppose, but that was a long time ago...At any rate, I just looked around the community, and it turns out that there are myriad people out there with disabling conditions of all sorts—a veritable plethora, as it were—and they're just not in church anywhere. So it came to me, why don't we become *the* church for people with disabilities and their families? You know, like people in wheelchairs and spastics and blind people and deaf people. There are lots of deaf people out there, and...

"Ah, yes, Maribel?...What's the point of it really, if they can't hear anything?

Yes, right, Maribel. That is the question, now isn't it, Maribel?... Richard?...Yes, that thing with their hands. Some of them certainly do that thing with their hands, don't they? Well, we'll get back to that...

"As I was saying, the very biggest potential is for all the mentally disabled children and adults. There are more of them around than I ever imagined. You know, especially the ones who drool or make those droll noises when you least expect it. Almost nobody wants them in their congregations! And these are Christian congregations, now mind you! So I'm sure we could bring in dozens of them to our church! And their families, too. Just think of it!

"Yes. Well, I see you are thinking of it, aren't you? Well, right. I'm open-minded. I suppose there may be some difficulties I hadn't foreseen. Okay. I'm listenng... Barbara?... Brownies? Yes, well, it just so happens that I have some experience with that. My great-aunt Tillie had such a tragic fall when she was...ah, well, but you don't need the details. The point is this: She used to bake brownies, and they were really great favorites of mine. One could hardly tell that they had been baked by someone in a wheelchair...No, really, they were that good. I shouldn't worry about the brownies, Barbara. Some



do and some don't, you know, pretty much just like regular people. Hmm?...No, no, Barbara, I assure you she baked them all by herself. Yes, and in a wheelchair...Inspiring? Well, perhaps it is. A bit, maybe. Hadn't really thought of it, I suppose. But I will...

"Well, now?...Inez?...Who would want to come to a church with all those people drooling and waving their hands around? Well, now that you mention it, I suppose some people might find it a bit, ah, put-offish, but then I don't imagine they're the kind of Christians we would want here anyway, now would they be? I mean, that's such a...how can I put it delicately?...such an *unchristian* way of looking at people, isn't it? I mean, wasn't it God who said, 'Mortals look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart'?...No, really, Jim, it's there in the Bible. Samuel something...

"Yes, Walter?...Have I considered the insurance problems? Yes, of course, Walter. You know the Board of Trustees always has a special place in my heart. Where would we be without you? But here's the beauty of this, Walter. This is practically insurance proof! Certainly. You see, most of them are pretty well buggered up already. Couldn't really get much worse, a lot of them. So I don't really see how we could have much liability at all. Not like some healthy specimen who trips on a carpet and wrenches his knee, and then you have problems, you see. Why my Aunt Tillie would have been positively delighted to be able to wrench her knee!...

"Yes, Barbara, the same one who baked the brownies in a wheelchair. Well, that's not quite right. She baked them in the oven, of course, just like you, but she was in a wheelchair at the time. That's why she couldn't wrench her knee, you see...Yes, well, I suppose church meetings really aren't the place for lighthearted comments, are they now?...

"Yes, Jim?...What about all those retarded people who can't understand what it's all about? Well, actually, I myself had once thought I should only allow people in church who understand what it's all about. But then I got to thinking about the Trinity and the indwelling Spirit and Original Sin and... well, it just wouldn't be practical, you see. And there are other things that

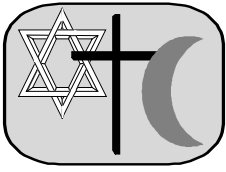
*(AD BOARD continued on page 4)*

*A voice cries out:*

*"In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord,  
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.  
Every valley shall be lifted up,  
and every mountain and hill be made low.  
The uneven ground shall become level,  
and the rough places a plain." Isaiah 40:3-4*

**NOW THAT'S  
WHAT I CALL  
ACCESSIBILITY!**





## GINNY THORNBURGH: SPREADING THE GOSPEL OF 'RELIGIOUS INCLUSION'

By Teresa Watanabe

**J**ust as the U.S. Supreme Court...extended educational services for children with disabilities, the "religious inclusion" movement to expand access to congregational life is mushrooming across the land...

[T]he National Organization on Disability has kicked off a campaign to commit 2,000 congregations by the year 2000 to tackle both physical and attitudinal barriers that prevent a full welcome to those with disabilities. The physical accommodations can range from ramps to large-print prayer books, but activists say accommodations of the heart are far more important.

"Of all the barriers, the greatest ones are those of attitude that limit who we are and what we can do," said Ginny Thornburgh, director of the organization's religion and disability program. "We need to realize that those of us with disabilities have gifts and talents to share with our congregations."

Thornburgh's stepson, Peter, was 4 months old when he suffered a severe brain injury in an auto accident that

killed his mother. Thornburgh became Peter's stepmother when he was 3, upon marrying former U.S. Attorney General Dick Thornburgh in 1963. She plunged into activism when she realized that others viewed the boy as an invisible child.

That reality was hammered home after she bore a son and was

immediately called by her church in Pittsburgh welcoming him to its nursery. Suddenly, she realized: No one had ever invited Peter to church. He did not, in their minds, exist.

"No one had ever mentioned Peter or his right to a full life of faith," Thornburgh said. "There are these defining moments in life, and that was it for me. The social justice surge goes through you like electricity, and and it just changes you."

Today, Thornburgh is active in spreading the gospel of religious inclusion across faith lines. She persuaded Pope John Paul II to convene an international conference on disabilities in 1992. She speaks across the nation and has edited or written three guidebooks on religious inclusion.

She is also a treasure trove of information on creative ways to embrace all worshipers. In treating people with Tourette's syndrome, a neurological disorder that can make them inappropriately shout out, for instance, one church installed a stationary bicycle in the back and another passed out origami paper to keep such worshipers calm enough to make it through the service....

Peter Thornburgh, now 39, is also active. He is a full-time volunteer at a food bank. He makes church visits twice weekly and recently played the role of a shepherd in a Christmas play. He lives in supervised housing and calls his parents every night....

Excerpted from "Ministering To The Whole Flock," *Los Angeles Times* [March 6, 1999]

### Accessible Congregations 2000 Campaign

To become a part of the Accessible Congregations 2000 Campaign, a faith group commits to the following principles:

- *In our congregation, people with disabilities are valued as individuals, having been created in the image of God;*
- *Our congregation is endeavoring to remove barriers of architecture, communications and attitudes that exclude people with disabilities from full and active participation; and*
- *People, with and without disabilities, are encouraged to practice their faith and use their gifts in worship, service, study and leadership.*

For a packet containing an application and further information on the program, contact: Accessible Congregations Campaign, National Organization on Disability, 910-16th St. NW, Suite 600, Washington DC 20006, Voice Telephone [202] 293-5960, TDD [202] 293-5968, Fax [202] 293-7999, E-mail religion@nod.org.

## UNITED METHODIST CHURCH RECOGNIZED AS 'ACCESSIBLE CONGREGATION'

**D**uring the May 2 worship service at Fallbrook United Methodist Church (Fallbrook, Calif.), the pastor, Dr. Dennis Ginoza, announced that the church had been recognized as an "Accessible Congregation" by the National Organization on Disability (NOD), as part of its Accessible Congregations Campaign.

To qualify as an "Accessible Congregation" and receive a certificate, the church had earlier submitted an application to NOD committing itself to increased attitudinal, communication, and physical accessibility to and acceptance of persons with disabilities.

A framed certificate from NOD's Religion and Disability Program was accepted on behalf of the entire congregation by Jo D'Archangelis, editor of a newsletter for United Methodists with disabilities.

Excerpted from *The Visitor* newsletter of the Fallbrook UMC [June 1999]



A non-official, non-profit quarterly newsletter published for, by and about United Methodist adults with disabling conditions

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**Computer Layout/Graphic Design**  
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Original stories, poetry, cartoons  
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Appropriate items from another source  
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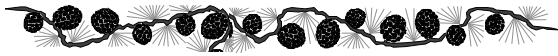
## Earl Miller Spiritual Life Disability Retreat

## VOICES FROM CEDAR GLEN



Participants at the 10th annual Earl Miller Spiritual Life Disability Retreat at Camp Cedar Glen (Calif.) discovered their creative gifts this year under the leadership of Dr. James Benedict, a retired cardiologist who at the age of 65 returned to school to earn an undergraduate degree in art. Benedict had the retreaters putting together collages and gathering into groups to write "communal" poetry. He also showed slides of his own artwork and read from his poetry (see below right). The Sunday morning Communion Service, led by the Rev. Thomas Reinhart-Marean, was co-incidentally (?) held on Pentecost Sunday. The creative fire of the Holy Spirit joined with the creative spirits of those worshipping for a memorable experience—and a memorable weekend.

Our special thanks to Dr. Benedict; Pastor Tom; Bill and Gigi Tell; Tom Simmons, retreat dean; Norm and Helen Stockwell, retreat registrars; Zelle Hammond; and Leticia Grosh, Lola Ruvalcaba, Anita Mendez, Santiago Redondo, Martin Robles Madrigal, Manuel and Margaret Nunez Delgado, and Juan Manuel Sepulveda who provided music for the Communion Service.



**When the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together.... Isaiah 40:5**

As a "Currently Able-Bodied Person" (my own term as I realize that my condition could change at any moment) I am very aware that I can never fully understand everything that those with disabilities experience. Yet as a pastor I would like to share those things that touch more on our common experiences and needs than on our differences.

I have had the privilege to lead music at the Earl Miller Spiritual Retreat since 1992. Although I have had to miss a few retreats because of other obligations, I have made the Disability Retreat a priority—not because of what I do for the retreat but because of what the retreat does for me. I always come away with a renewed vision and sense of purpose. My relationship with God is strengthened and my sensitivity to his voice is sharpened. It is a highlight of each year.

This year was no exception. As I came away, the one thought that struck me most was what we as campers—as people—shared. On Saturday we did an exercise where we wrote poems as a group. Each of us had to add a line to the poem, but we only saw the line written by the person immediately preceding us. The rest was unknown.

It was fascinating to see how many times the same themes were carried throughout by those in each group. Regardless of our physical differences, there was an obvious similarity of spiritual condition.

The more I learn about God, the more I realize what I do not know. I do not completely understand the seeming conflict between his grace and power and all of the suffering and problems that I see around me. But I am beginning to get a glimpse of his love for each of us as individual spiritual beings. Our need for this love is I

believe the most universal of all human needs. Our acceptance and experience of that love as demonstrated through his Son makes us one in him and gives us the strength and courage to handle the circumstances of life.

We have a new family in our church. All three of the children in this family have serious disabilities. Joshua, the youngest, has Tourette's Syndrome. Sarah was born with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and operates at a much lower level mentally than her chronological fourteen years. Daniel, the oldest, has severe cerebral palsy and needs 24/7 care. Although Daniel cannot speak, the light in his eyes when our church begins to sing and worship communicates volumes. It is this spiritual part of us that brings us together and unites us through our Lord, Jesus Christ.

— William Tell —

**The creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. Romans 8:21**

Tell is a full-time high school teacher and the pastor of the New Wine Christian Fellowship in Crestline, Calif.

I attend the Earl Miller Spiritual Life Retreat for people with disabilities at Camp Cedar Glen each year. Love is rampant! Everyone seems to feel it—even the two dogs that were present this year.

Shadow, a huge black Labrador, wore a sturdy harness and pulled his one-legged human, Santiago, in his wheelchair. He stood by or lay near his human at all times. He never made a sound and was ever alert to his human's movements and needs at all times. He was a "one-man" dog and ignored everybody else.

General Mills, a big and blonde Labrador, wanted to show his love for everybody there. He was a "seeing eye" dog and took his occupation seriously when his human, Abby, put his harness on him or needed him for guidance. He loved being taken for walks in the beautiful cedar surroundings.

When we were in meetings, each dog lay quietly on the floor at his human's feet, or wheels. When we sang, they seemed to enjoy every note. When we prayed, Shadow lay with his front paws crossed.

They were so wonderfully obedient and useful to their humans, and we all became quite fond of them.

We ended our last session with a

(CEDAR GLEN continued on page 4)

## A SONNET SIXTY FIVE

When I was young, I went to many schools,  
my teachers were all so old.  
They filled the brains of other fools  
and poured gold into my own mind mold.  
They gave me wisdom, good advice,  
guided me how to search and grope.  
Parents taught me to be polite and nice,  
read, learn and always have hope.  
Now I'm old and go to school again,  
my teachers are now so young.  
They stretch ideas to fit my rigid pen,  
make new songs which I've never sung.  
Young professors force me to forget my past,  
look to the future for as long as I can last.

— James S. Benedict, M.D. —

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(AD BOARD continued from page 1)



pageantry and ritual and music and drama and dance and celebration and community, and...now I know this is a Bible thing, but I have to say it...like love...

"I mean, if God is love and if those who love know God, it seems to me that a lot of those, ah, retarded people could be instruments of love and participants in celebration without ever having to understand the, ah, Wesleyan Quadrilateral...Or is it just me? Well, we can talk about it later..."

"In any case, I've been thinking about perhaps focusing my messages a bit more—a tad less erudite, you know, and more concise...Can't have the sign language interpreters developing carpal tunnel syndrome, now can we? Now there's an insurance problem!...Anyway, after 20

years' experience I've learned you can't talk people into the kingdom...  
c a n b e understood, you know, like

Richard?...Changes? Well, yes, I should say there would have to be some changes...Wait...wait, please! There's no cause to get hysterical about it! Order, order! Please! Someone pat Maribel on the back and get her some more Hawaiian Punch! Thank you...that's better...Now, for example, there is the question of a ramp into the chancel area and...Oh, dear! Someone please punch Maribel again! I mean, get her some more punch!...

"I...ah, well, perhaps this is a bit much all at once. I suppose we could table this discussion until next month's meeting...Ah, yes, well, back to you, Richard...."

*(The fragment ends here, the remainder of the manuscript apparently having been lost. Or recycled. — Ed.)*

(CEDAR GLEN continued from page 3)

Holy Communion service. No one objected—in fact, we were all of one accord—when the minister, Pastor Tom, suggested that Shadow and Mills be included in our communion. Each dog took the juice-soaked morsel of bread quietly and devoutly. It was as though they were as Spirit-filled as we humans were.

We all felt that God had especially blessed Shadow and Mills. But we humans also received a special blessing from each of them.

— Louise Cook-Stolte —

**At 80-something, Cook-Stolte is a scooter-borne amputee and member of the Arlington United Methodist Church in Riverside, Calif.**

*The following benediction was composed especially for the retreat worship service:*

May we feel God's unconditional love in a deep and special way as we leave this sacred campsite.  
May each of us care more deeply about those who need healing and loving so desperately.  
And may every life that we are privileged to touch blossom and grow for time and eternity.  
Amen.

— Rev. Wilbur Johnson —

**Johnson is a scooter-borne post-polio survivor who pastors part-time in Richmond, Calif.**

Many have learned that...

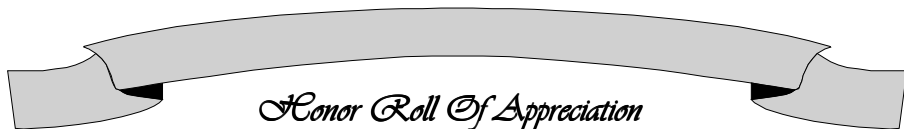
A person who hears less may see more.

One who sees less may perceive more.

One who speaks slowly may have more to say.

A person who moves with difficulty may have a clearer sense of direction.

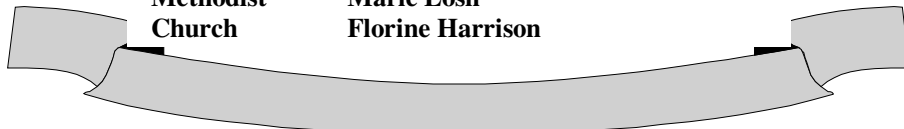
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THE 2000 EARL MILLER SPIRITUAL LIFE RETREAT FOR PERSONS WITH ORTHOPEDIC AND/OR VISION DISABILITIES WILL MEET AT CAMP CEDAR GLEN NEAR JULIAN, CALIF., MAY 19-21. THE RETREAT LEADER WILL BE THE REV. WILBUR JOHNSON.



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